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STAMPS IN CARDIOLOGY

Jan Evangelista Purkinje (1787-1869)

Czechoslovakia issued two stamps in 1937 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Purkinje (spelt Purkyně in Czech). The label (A) illustrates part of a medical design and features the staff and serpent. It is not incorporated in the stamp (B) and is frequently lost when the stamp is in used condition, the label having been torn off.

Jan Evangelista Purkinje was born in Libochovice, Bohemia, and graduated in medicine from Prague. While he was professor of physiology at the University of Breslau he made several widely acclaimed scientific discoveries. He was one of the very first to use the microscope to explore the function of tissues, "histophysiology" as he called it, and he introduced the term protoplasm. In 1839 he described the subendocardial structures in the

heart, known ever since as the Purkinje fibres. Later it was realised that the network of Purkinje can be seen with the naked eye in the sheep and the ox, and the whole arborisation shown clearly by injecting the sheaths of the fibres with India ink. S Tawara identified the atrioventricular node in 1906 and showed that the AV bundle was prolonged into the Purkinje network. A few years later it was possible with Einthoven's invention of the electrocardiograph to quantify the rate of conduction and rhythmicity in the Purkinje substance. Purkinje has ten other eponymous descriptions to his name, the best known being the cells in the cerebellum. He described the classification of fingerprints and their importance for identification.

M K DAVIES
A HOLLMAN



(A)



(B)